THREE LONDON PREACHERS

Phases of English Religious Life—The Rev. Dr. Bryce Preaches in St. Stephen's Church (Ralph Connor's), Winnipeg

Rev. Dr. Bryce, who returned lately from England, conducted service yesterday, Aug. 12, '06, in St. Stephen's Presbyterian church, before large congregations. He spoke of sermons heard in City Temple, Whitfield Memorial chapel, and St. Paul's cathedral. He dealt with the subject of the "Higher Criticism and of its Present State in Britain." His morning discourse was as follows:

2 Tim. 1-13: "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Jesus Christ."

Sound words. What a beautiful expression! Not only clear words; and elegant and eloquent words; classic words or clever words; or even true words—but sound words, i. e., timely and well considered words and words having in them the very atmosphere of benediction. As says the Wise Man: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver," or again, "a word spoken in due season how good it is!"

Sound words are not easy to find, and they are not easy to hold when they are found.

There are so many hasty, empty, foolish, inappropriate words—especially in religion—that we often feel ourselves among the many that say, "Who will show us any good?"

But however hard the form of sound words is to find, there is a hidden treasure; and diligent and intelligent search will enable us to find it, and courage, faith, and a good conscience will enable us to keep—to hold fast the precious words of truth.

This I say also to remind you how critical, how dangerous a thing it is to deal lightly and carelessly with the oracles of the living God; how responsible a thing it is to make a mistake in relation to the words of the Lord Jesus, who said "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

How perilous it is to handle deceitfully, or to speak slightingly of, or to undervalue the word of God—the Bible—which is living, and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.

London Preachers.

While lately in London this train of thought was started, after hearing the well known preachers of the world's metropolis.

The first of these was the Rev. Silvester Horne, who was the preacher in the famous Whitfield Memorial chapel on Tottenham Court Road. The congregation was large, the preacher fluent, his diction was perfect, and his subject was the duty of growing in knowledge of divine things. His thesis was to show the progress made in theology in our age. He showed the more rational conception of God, as a loving God compared with the cruel view of a preceding generation; he stated also the improved idea of morality as shown in the development of Bible history from Abraham to the Christian era; he pointed out the changed conception in regard to the Bible as having lost the narrow or bibliolatrous place which our ancestors gave it, and he denied any specially inspired power, as possessed by any scripture writer in which Shakespeare and Tennyson did not join. The service was conducted in the usual simple way, with introduction of some features of the English prayer book.

It was agreeable and inspiring, while somewhat disquieting. Another preacher heard, perhaps more celebrated than Mr. Horne, was Rev. R. J. Campbell in the City Temple on Holborn viaduct, the old pulpit of the great Dr. Parker. It was the Thursday noonday service which Dr. Parker for many years conducted for London business men. If anything the attendance seemed rather larger than in Dr. Parker's time, probably 1,000 or 1,200 being present. One lacked the sonorous voice of Parker, for in the rear portion of the church Campbell is not well heard. The sermon was from what we have been accustomed to call the celebrated Messianic passage in Isa. 53, beginning, "He was oppressed and he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth," etc. The speaker proceeded to give the recent theory of the Deutero-Isaiah, contending that a second Isaiah, after the exile, had written from the beginning of the 35th chapter of the book, pointing out the difference, in tone, in style, in allusion and general intent. He then alluded to the general idea that the 53rd chapter referred to the sufferings of Christ, but contended that this was only in so far as the Christ partook in the sufferings of the martyrs and suffering souls of humanity. I was surprised that the preacher made no reference to the passage in Acts viii, where the Ethiopian treasurer asked in regard to this very passage, Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other man? Where the answer is given so clearly Ver. 35, "Then Philip began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus." The sermon well worked out was to the intent that victory always comes to the sufferer who meekly and heroically endures.

Archdeacon Sinclair.

Another sermon on a Sunday afternoon in June was in St. Paul's cathedral, when Archdeacon Sinclair preached. This service was very beautiful, artistic even, in its every part. The congregation seemed small in the vast cathedral, but there were probably a thousand present. It was not easy to hear in the great auditorium, but the archdeacon managed his voice probably as well as it could be done. His sermon was in special advocacy of the Sunday league, a crusade which was taking place on that day throughout England and Scotland. This movement is a remarkable one, consisting of clergy and laity of both the Established and Nonconformist churches in England and Scotland. The league is largely among the higher and middle classes and aims at employers of labor, both in public and private spheres, so framing their time on Sunday as to give as far as possible all servants and employees freedom for rest and worship. The sermon was forty minutes long, and was largely a collection of opinions of great men, Macaulay, Gladstone, Beaconsfield, and even many French writers on the value of the rest day, and advocating that the day be made one of religion. The preacher dealt with the question of the pre-Mosaic existence of the Sabbath and of the change of the day from Saturday to Sunday by the early Christians. He claimed credit for the Church of England as always in the church and its branches in the United States and the colonies preserving the use of the Ten Commandments in church communion service.

I have thus given an account of several quite different phases of the English pulpit. These may be taken as typical examples of the progress of investigation, discussion and religious life. I wish to state in connection with the text my view on this use of the critical faculty involved in these opinions and the position we should take in regard to it.

Must Grant Liberty.

We must be willing to have the Bible investigated to the fullest degree. We are believers in liberty, in freedom of thought. To deny that to all men is to plunge us again into the centuries of superstition. The world suffered too much to ever deny again the right of private judgment to men. Then again we should be thankful that new life and interest have been given to certain parts of the Bible—especially the minor prophets by the activity of the critical scholars usually known as "Higher Critics." So long as discussion is conducted reverently, so long as accurate scholarship is cultivated, and so long as men of religious minds engage in these investigations we must approve of their industry and hope that they may reach correct conclusions.

Higher Critics.

Further still we can see certain things that have followed the spread of higher criticism which have resulted in a decided advantage. The minds of men have been directed to the practical truths, the spiritual side of the great Christian verity as never before. To most of us what the great

German Professor Albrecht Ritschl held would seem heretical, and yet his preference for the practical side of theology and his opposition to scholasticism and the philosophizing mania have been of highest advantage to religion. The additions that have been made to the surroundings of the Bible—its environment, if we may so speak of it—by Professor George Adam Smith and others of this school have been of the utmost importance. The history, the customs and manners, and the allusions of Bible times have been made more real and more human to us by such writers. The Bible has so to speak been taken from the glass case in which some people had enshrined it and has come to be to us a book with a human as well as a divine side to it. Even the revised version, which some have never learned to like, and which Professor Saintsbury so severely attacks on the literary side, represents a movement which sought to make the translation as perfect as possible.

Yet while we are thankful for the results and are not afraid to see the critical movement go forward we must be earnest in holding fast the form of sound words which has meant so much to us and to our fathers.

Highly Orthodox.

A new work has been published during the present year by Professor James Orr, D. D., of Glasgow, who is well known to us as having lectured in Manitoba college. It is called "The Problem of the Old Testament," and is the work to which the Bruce prize of $6,000 was awarded by the American trustees. Dr. Orr was described to me by a London minister as being "very orthodox," meaning, I suppose, that his mind was not quite open enough to new views, but the book covers the ground well, and to those who wish to see the scope of the question will be very useful. Some of his positions seem very well taken.

He says: "Nearly everything in the critical discussion of the history and religion of the Old Testament depends on the presupposition with which we start."

The radical critic believes there was no divine revelation; the miraculous and supernatural are "sounding brass" to him. His whole question is, "How did such legends come to be formed?" Kuenen declares that "the higher religious ideas" are conclusive marks of the unhistorical character of the narratives. On the other hand, if the Old Testament be taken in the light of "its own presuppositions," then the history seems natural, consistent, reasonable. To one who believes in a God and the Christian verity the divinity of Christ and His miraculous work appear suitable and appropriate.

Prophecy and Inspiration.

It will be noticed that the important points on which Rev. Messrs. Campbell and Horne are criticisable are prophecy and inspiration. The most generally Messianic passage in the Old Testament is doubted by Mr. Campbell. As we have said, the use made of this passage by the evangelist Philip in the Acts would seem to establish it.

Dr. Orr well brings out, perhaps what Mr. Campbell was aiming at. The prophet was in the first instance a man speaking to his own time—to some real and urgent need of his own age. Modern criticism has called attention to this. But modern criticism is wrong in denying or making light of the element of prediction. Abraham, says Jesus, "rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad." Again Mr. Horne's view of inspiration does away with the very conception on which the Bible rests. The Bible professes to be a revelation of the divine to the human. Dr. Orr well says: "No more than the revelation from which it springs, is the Bible a product of mere human wisdom, but has God for its inspiring source." We could not say this of Shakespeare or Tennyson. Prophecy, miracle, and inspiration all stand on this footing. We may not be able to show how the contact of the divine with the human takes place, any more than we can tell how the mind and body work together, but we can observe the results of the interaction in both cases.

We have not time to follow the combatants through the mazes of debate on the documents said to have been used—all suppositions—or to take up the arbitrary declarations about books evidently of early date being brought down to the time of the exile or later, or to deal with inaccuracies, which are explained by the errors of copyists, but would call attention after Dr. Orr to some of the remarkable discoveries in Egypt and the east which show the utter worthlessness of many of the criticisms made. The German Ewald says truly: 'The Bible through and through is of historical nature and spirit." See the following:

1. The story of Chedarlaomer being met by Abraham, B. C. 2100, Wellhausen and others declared the story a complete fiction.

It has now been discovered
there was such a Babylonian
that he at that time invaded Pales
and the Bible story is vindicated.

2. In regard to the story of Jo
Van Bohlen and others mainta
that it was largely false. The E
tian monuments since examined
disposed of every one of the objec
of th critic.

3. The Mosaic history has been s
ially attacked. As to the Egyp
dynasties Petrie declared that the
three so-called dynasties of k
"were a blank, and were on the
plane as the mythical kings of P
or th primaeval kings of Ireland

Professor Petrie himself found a
ward the mummies of these
kings; and actually found the n
"Israel" inscribed on Egyptian m
ments.

4. The date of the Exodus has
a subject of much debate. Recent
covers in Egypt seem likely to lo
a settlement of this question.

5. The Bible frequently refers t
"Kings of the Hittites." F. W. M
man not being able to find any an
writer speaking of them spoke on
account of the "unhistorical tone o
Bible." From Egyptian and Ass
inscriptions found later many allu
are made to the Hittite kingdom:
the Bible is shown to be historical

6. The critics have sought to
the book of Daniel down to the
of the Maccabees—four hundred y
later than usually held.

Late discoveries are rendering
theory impossible. It was the fa
to deny the historicity of Belsha
On inscriptions and tablets the n
of Belshazzar has now been foun

In the opinion of many theolo
the force of the more radical criti
has spent itself. The inability o
many schools of criticism to agree
hastened this result. But for the
liever in the Christian verity we
"Hold fast the form of sound wo
Some have been perplexed by the
casional echoes they have heard o
conflict. Many have held fast and
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A Faithful Statement.

I close with the words written to me by one of the most able of the younger theologians whom I met in Britain—one who had studied under the leading advanced minds in Holland, France and Germany. He had gone through the mill, and his statement not before published speaks for itself:

"I have learned from Dillman and Kuenen, to attach more weight to the results of careful study of the Bible than to traditional views about it. But I have not learned anything to destroy my reverence for it, or to lead me to doubt that God has revealed His mind to Moses and the prophets and in His providential dealings with Israel. I have learned from Ritschl to bring into relief the practical side of all doctrines and measure their value and truth not merely by the terms employed in defining them, but by the faith they express and the religious needs they meet. I have also received from Harnack the general principle that the creeds of the early councils of the church (and so far, also our own) are affected in expression by the moulds of Greek thought in which they have been set. But I have not learned to condemn a doctrine because it is Greek (as Harnack tends to do) or to decry metaphysics (as Ritschl did). . . . . I prefer the Nicene creed to the Arian. I can form no image of semi-divinity. I believe that Jesus is the word made flesh and that in Him humanity and divinity meet. . . . . I believe in the Divineness of Christ's ministry of healing and do not profess to have rationalized the miracles. . . . . I believe that faith in the risen, all-living Christ is the copestone of all faith in all he was and thought." Let us, my brethren hold fast the Christian verity; let us sympathize with our brothers who may be in religious doubt. Let us not upbraid them, or denounce, or deal hardly with them. Jesus Christ did not do so with the honest doubter. Some of us, to use Tennyson's line, have "faced the spectres of the mind and laid them." Let us hear ringing down the ages, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."